City of Lafayette Staff Report

For: Redevelopment Agency Board

By: Ann Merideth, Community Development Director

Date Written: November 19, 2008

Meeting Date: November 24, 2008

Subject: Update on the Downtown Strategy Project

Introduction

The Downtown Strategy process was initiated in December 2006. Since that time, slow but steady progress has been made towards a vision statement and specific plan for the downtown. This update to the Agency summarizes what has occurred over the past two years and describes the next steps in the process over the next 12-18 months.

What has happened to date with the Strategy project

Public input

The Downtown Strategy is a community-based planning process. In the past two years, there have been a number of outreach activities.

Activity	Outreach
Vistas	The downtown planning process was explained on front page of Winter 2007 edition. *The Strategy for Downtown Lafayette* was the headline and main story in the Summer 2007 edition. A summary of the citywide survey was in the Fall 2007 edition. An article about downtown planning and climate protection was in the Spring 2008 edition.
Citywide Survey	A citywide survey and cover letter explaining the Strategy process was sent to about 11,000 residences and businesses. A return rate of this type of survey is typically around 10%; the return rate of this survey was about 24%.
City Website	The website has a section on the homepage for the Strategy. The page is updated regularly with information and exhibits.
Advisory Committee meetings	Fifteen meetings have been held to date. Agendas with date, time and location of each meeting are listed on the City's website under Downtown Strategy news and meetings are on the City Calendar. Meeting notes and other documents are also posted on the website.
Community Workshops	Two workshops have been held to date. Approximately 70-80 people attended each. The third will be scheduled after the first of the year. Past workshops were advertised with display ads in the *Sun*. Postcard and email announcements were sent to 300-400 homeowner groups, major downtown property owners and businesses, Chamber, schools, and interested parties. Workshop #1 was announced in the Summer 2007 *Vistas* and cover letter for the citywide survey.

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Activity	Outreach
City Manager's Friday Message	Current information about the Strategy is included regularly in the Message. This has a large email distribution, and it is posted every week as the first item on the City's homepage.
Stakeholder Interviews	On January 25, 2008, WRT held interviews with representatives from the following groups: Town Hall Theater; Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee; Sustainable Lafayette; Lafayette Methodist Church (downtown property owner, historic building); Lafayette School District; Acalanes High School District; and downtown small businesses.
Intercept Interviews	WRT conducted spontaneous interviews in the downtown and at the Community Center on March 21 and 22, 2008.
Library Display	A display of conceptual options and other information about the Strategy was at the Library from March 21 through 31. The display was announced by postcard and email to 300-400 homeowner groups, major downtown property owners and businesses, Chamber, schools, and interested parties. An article about the display was in the *Sun*. The Library averages about 500 visitors per day.
Presentation at school	City staff made a presentation to third graders that included getting their ideas about the downtown.
Lafayette Homeowners Council	WRT met with LHC on March 19, 2008.
Downtown Property Owners and Businesses	On January 25, 2008, personal letters were sent to approximately 60 major property owners and businesses explaining the Strategy process and inviting them to attend Workshop #2. Staff followed up with personal calls to five local major owners.
Commissions & Committees	Advisory Committee members report back to their respective commissions on a regular basis. This includes Planning, Circulation, Parks, Trails & Recreation, Senior Services, and Creeks. The Environmental Task Force also has the Strategy as a regular item on its agendas.

Grants

Lafayette has received two grants related to the Downtown Strategy:

- BAAQMD – In December 2007, the City was awarded a $75,000 climate change grant from the Bay Area Quality Management District. The City's match is in-kind services. The funding was to include climate change modeling in the Strategy. The original term of the grant was to end in August 31, 2008 with the submittal of the completed Strategy. Because of the pause in the planning process to allow the Advisory Committee more time, the term was extended to March 31, 2009 at City staff's request.

- ABAG/MTC – Lafayette's downtown is a Priority Development Area. This designation facilitated the awarding of a Station Area Planning grant from ABAG and MTC with federal money. This grant is $150,000 towards the environmental review of the Strategy. The Agency's match is $45,000. ABAG and MTC staff recently approved the proposed schedule and scope of work for the environmental review, and we are awaiting the grant agreement for final signatures. The term of the grant is from April 2009 with the commencement of the environmental review to June 2010 with the adoption of the Final Strategy by the City Council. It should be noted that the environmental review will be completed by a different team of consultants that will be selected following the federal requirements for our grant.

Revised Housing Element

The City is required to submit an approved revised Housing Element to State Housing and Community Development by June 30, 2009. Because the downtown will be where housing can be developed to meet our RHNA goals, it is important that the Strategy and the Housing Element work are concurrent and consistent. The attached schedule of next steps for the Strategy shows includes the closely-related steps for the Housing Element.

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee has met 15 times – seven meetings with WRT and eight without. The latter meetings have allowed the Committee to understand the background behind WRT's and work through the basic concepts for downtown's future redevelopment. One of the most significant tasks completed by the Committee was revising the draft goals that were originally developed by WRT. These goals will form the policy framework for the Strategy. The latest version is attached.

What are the next steps

The Strategy process is entering its third year, but there is still much to be done. The immediate goal is to get a draft Plan to the City Council in March. The action that will be taken by the Council at that time will not be the adoption the Final Strategy. Rather, the Council will accept the Draft Strategy for environmental review; adoption of the final document cannot occur until the public environmental review process is completed and the document is publicly reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council. Adoption of the Final Strategy is planned for late spring 2010. The attached schedule shows the next steps in the process. It reflects the input of the Advisory Committee at its September 11 meeting.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Attachments

Next Steps – Downtown Strategy and Housing Element Revision *(as of 11/13/08 – subject to revision)*
Draft Goals *(as of 8/20/08)*

Next Steps – Downtown Strategy and Housing Element Revision *(as of 11/13/08 – subject to revision)*

	Downtown Strategy	Housing Element Revision
Nov 2008	▫ Consultant meeting with Advisory Committee (Nov 5) ▫ Preparation of Draft Plan	▫ Preparation of Draft Revision
Dec 2008	▫ Advisory Committee meeting to discuss goals and actions ▫ Preparation of Draft Plan	▫ Preparation of Draft Revision
Jan 2009	▫ Advisory Committee meeting to discuss Draft Plan ▫ Public review of Draft Plan (and General Plan amendment, if needed) ▫ Community Workshop	▫ Public review of Draft Revision ▫ Planning Commission and City Council public hearings on Draft Revision
Feb 2009	▫ Community Workshop ▫ Joint presentation by consultant to City Council, Commissions (Planning, Design Review, Circulation, PTR), Environmental Task Force, and Advisory Committee on Draft Plan (and GP amendment) ▫ Consultant meeting with Advisory Committee	▫ Planning Commission and City Council public hearings on Draft Revision ▫ Preparation of final Draft Revision ▫ Submittal of final Draft Revision to State HCD
Mar 2009	▫ Preparation of final Draft Plan ▫ City Council acceptance of final Draft Plan (and GP amendment) for environmental review (Mar 23) ▫ Submittal of final Draft Plan to BAAQMD (by Mar 30)	▫ State HCD review of final Draft Revision ▫ Environmental review of final Draft Revision
Apr 2009	▫ Public scoping for environmental review	▫ State HCD review of final Draft Revision ▫ Environmental review of final Draft Revision
May 2009	▫ Public scoping for environmental review ▫ Preparation of Draft EIR	▫ Preparation of Final Revision ▫ Planning Commission and City Council public hearings on Final Revision
Jun 2009	▫ Preparation of Draft EIR	▫ Planning Commission and City Council public hearings on Final Revision ▫ City Council adoption of Final Revision (Jun 22) ▫ Submittal of adopted Final Revision to State HCD (by Jun 30)
Jul 2009	▫ Preparation of Draft EIR	▫ State HCD review of adopted Final Revision
Aug 2009	▫ Preparation of Draft EIR	▫ State HCD review of adopted Final Revision
Sep 2009	▫ Preparation of Draft EIR	▫ State HCD review of adopted Final Revision ▫ State HCD certification of adopted Final Revision
Oct 2009	▫ Public review of Draft EIR ▫ Planning Commission public hearing on Draft EIR	
Nov 2009	▫ Public review of Draft EIR	
Dec 2009	▫ Preparation of Final EIR	
Jan 2010	▫ Preparation of Final EIR	
Feb 2010	▫ Planning Commission and City Council public hearings on Final EIR	
Mar 2010	▫ City Council certification of Final EIR ▫ Preparation of Final Plan	
Apr 2010	▫ Planning Commission public hearings on Final Plan (and GP amendment)	
May 2010	▫ City Council public hearings on Final Plan (and GP amendment) ▫ City Council adoption of Final Plan (and GP amendment)	

Lafayette Downtown Strategy

DRAFT GOALS

Circulation Goal:

"A downtown that is safe and convenient to get to and get around in"

Develop a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategy that anticipates likely downtown growth, manages traffic congestion, encourages alternate modes including the enhancement of transit use and manages downtown parking supply and demand (some of these strategies are outlined below, others will be part of a more detailed strategy recommendation).

Preliminary Traffic Strategies Recommended:

- Explore strategies to both calm traffic and relieve congestion on Mount Diablo Boulevard.
- Review the congestion on Moraga Road associated with drop-off and pick-up at schools and at the intersection with Mount Diablo Boulevard. Explore reinstating a school bus system for downtown schools.
- Implement a strategy to reduce use of Mt. Diablo Blvd as a by-pass when Hwy 24 is congested.
- Promote development patterns that support increased pedestrian activity (i.e., reduced vehicle trips) in the downtown, including the creation of more compact, walkable sub-districts that allow downtown residents and visitors to park once and walk to their destinations.

  Comment: The term "sub-district" needs to be defined – is a sub-district six square blocks or la Fiesta Square?
- In anticipation of a likely level of future growth, explore a distribution and mix of land uses along the length of the Mt. Diablo Blvd corridor that manages congestion to the greatest extent possible (i.e., disperses peak hour trips).
- Match allowable levels of growth to acceptable levels of traffic congestion, as currently defined in the General Plan, over the 20-year planning horizon.

Preliminary Parking Strategies Recommended:

- Develop a Parking Demand Management strategy that regulates the use of parking in the downtown area by both increasing efficiency and ease of use and encouraging other modes of circulation.
- Provide more efficient parking near key downtown destinations through the use of better organized, aggregated parking nodes.
- Consider strategically located parking facilities especially where they can have dual function for public and private use.
- Develop parking guidelines and strategies that encourage retail buildings next to the street.

Preliminary Pedestrian/Bicycle Strategies Recommended:

- Add sidewalks where there are currently gaps in the Downtown's system of sidewalks.

- Promote pedestrian safety by eliminating areas with unrestricted vehicular access across pedestrian zone (e.g., Diamond K, El Charro, etc.).
- Promote continuity and sidewalks widths that accommodate street trees, street furniture, pedestrians (i.e., meet ADA requirements at a minimum), and public amenities, such as outdoor dining spaces.
- Provide an off-street path system that utilizes the creek corridors as its foundation and provides pedestrian linkages to Mount Diablo Blvd. and nearby streets.
- Establish a continuous and interconnected system of bike paths and bike lanes filling in current gaps in the network and expanding the network where possible.
- Develop connections between properties and streets that shorten pedestrian and bicycle travel.
- Improve pedestrian safety and improve north-south crossings on Mount Diablo Blvd.
- Promote modifications to City regulations in order to build and sustain a downtown employment culture that supports alternatives to driving.

Preliminary Transit Strategies Recommended:

- Explore with transit agencies a shuttle or para-transit service that loops through the downtown and to BART and aggregated parking areas.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to BART station.
- Increase the frequency of bus service through the downtown.
- Cluster transit-supportive mixed-use development near BART station.
- Lower parking ratio requirements for downtown land uses according to distance from BART in order to reflect increased transit use.

Land Use Goal:

"A mix of uses that addresses the diverse needs of the Lafayette community, takes advantage of transit and contributes to a vibrant downtown environment"

Preliminary Land Use Strategies Recommended:

- Introduce and preserve more housing in the downtown, particularly for seniors and younger households.
- Encourage higher density housing and mixed use development within walking distance of BART station.
- Explore strategies for promoting the retention and development of unique and locally-owned businesses.
- Explore a strategy of promoting the creation of subareas within the redevelopment area that are characterized by clusters of complementary types of businesses and uses.
- Encourage a diverse mix of restaurants.
- Allow for automobile service uses, focusing along the east end of Mount Diablo Blvd..

- Continue to discourage non-conforming gas station uses from pedestrian-oriented retail areas.
- Promote and preserve more entertainment/cultural uses in the downtown, such as movie theaters, music venues, and a performing arts theater.
- Create a senior center in the downtown.
- Consider grouping civic uses in the downtown area to make them more accessible and to create more synergy in the downtown.
- Encourage the creation of public outdoor gathering places in the downtown area.
- Promote the transformation of key properties to improve their downtown function in keeping with the community's goals.

Community Character Goal:

"Preserve and enhance a unique sense of place characterized as a small-town environment within a unique natural setting"

Preliminary Private Property Strategies Recommended:

- Continue to guide the development of the commercial/mixed-use and residential neighborhoods to encourage the continued evolution of a distinctive Lafayette character (described in general as informal with variations in styles, massing and setbacks, public sightlines to surrounding hills and a dominance of landscape) and a high level of quality.
- Develop architectural design guidelines to encourage and support the above strategy.
- Encourage remodeling of buildings to contribute positively to the character of downtown.
- Refine signage guidelines to support the desired downtown character.

Preliminary Public Realm Strategies Recommended:

- Improve the function, safety, comfort and visual quality of the downtown streetscape through such means as sidewalk enhancement, planting and furnishings.
- Create an on-street parking plan that ensures a desired streetscape environment.
- Develop guidelines and strategies that encourage the development of streetfront retail.
- Develop landscape improvements that create a Lafayette-unique sense of landscape along Mount Diablo Blvd. and other downtown streets (characterized by a natural, informal landscape palette influenced by the surrounding natural environment). Through streetscape design, differentiate between key streets and street segments to enhance the sense of districts and of a compact downtown core.

Preliminary Historic/Cultural Resources Strategies Recommended:

- Develop strategies to preserve buildings and places with historical and cultural significance and explore appropriate and viable uses for such buildings.

- Explore the concept of a cultural/arts district in the downtown (e.g., focused around Plaza Park and the new library) that includes a cluster of supportive uses and establishes a downtown destination.

- Promote the expression of the arts in the public realm.

Parks, Public Spaces and Creeks Goal:

"A downtown that takes advantage of its natural resources by creating a network of parks, public spaces, pathways and greenways that provides connectivity, gathering places and recreational opportunity to the community"

Preliminary City-Owned Parks/Plazas Strategies Recommended

- Preserve, promote and enhance downtown area public gathering spaces that accommodate a variety of activities and that are easily accessible to shops and services.

- Provide new and preserve existing City-owned parks in the downtown area.

- Promote synergies among public gathering spaces, parks, and public facilities and amenities that integrate with and support a vital commercial core.

- Introduce a playground downtown to provide needed facilities for children and to attract more families downtown.

Preliminary Public Spaces in Private Development Strategies Recommended

- Encourage more public gathering spaces that serve a variety of uses as part of private development.

- Adopt guidelines and incentives for providing public spaces that can be applied to downtown commercial and residential development.

- Locate and design public places to enhance and encourage the pedestrian experience.

Preliminary Creek Corridor Strategies Recommended

- Enhance, restore, preserve and protect creeks and creek corridors as public greenways that connect people to their destinations around the downtown and natural settings.

- Incorporate creeks and creek corridors as part of downtown parks and gathering places.

- Encourage and provide incentives to businesses and other land uses that protect, enhance and utilize creeks and creek corridors as public use and public access spaces.

Preliminary Pathway and Trail Strategy Recommended

- Provide a pathway and trails network that enhances circulation in the downtown, and, where feasible, connect to Lafayette trails identified on the Master Trails Plan.